

Sexual Violence Against Sex Workers

Sex workers are female, male, or transgender adults who receive money or goods in exchange for consensual sexual acts. Many individuals involved in sex work find the term “prostitute” to be demeaning, stigmatizing, and outdated. During this fact sheet, the word “prostitution” will only be used when quoting from public policy or government documentation. MCASA believes that every sexual assault victim/survivor deserves accessible, compassionate and respectful care.

Maryland Statistics

- Maryland defines prostitution as the performance of a sexual act, sexual contact, or vaginal intercourse for hire.
Md. Code Ann. [Crim. Law], § 11-301
- In Maryland, a person convicted of the misdemeanor of prostitution may be sentenced to up to one year in prison or a fine of up to \$500, or both.
Maryland State Commission on Criminal Sentencing Policy, “Sentencing Guidelines Offense Table (Updated 4/1/14)”, 2014.
- In Maryland, 1,465 people were arrested for prostitution and/or commercialized vice in 2010.
Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Crime in the United States Arrest Data Tables”, www.fbi.gov.

Nationally

- In a 2002 study of female sex workers who had been jailed, it was found that 82% had been physically assaulted, 83% had been threatened with a weapon, and 84% experienced current or past homelessness.
Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, “Unlocking Options for Women: A Survey of Women in Cook Co. Jail”.
- 24% of adult rape survivors indicated that they had engaged in post-assault sex work. The most commonly cited reason they gave for engaging in sex work was that it allowed them to regain control of their lives and bodies after their sexual assault.
Violence and Victims, “The Relationship Between Adult Sexual Assault and Prostitution: An Exploratory Analysis,” R. Campbell, et al., 2003.
- A study of 130 sex workers living in San Francisco found that:
 - 75% reported a history of childhood sexual abuse, by an average of 3 perpetrators
 - 68% had reported being raped since becoming sex workers
 - 48% had been raped more than five times
 - 46% of those who reported rapes stated that they had been raped by customers
 - 49% reported that pornography was made of them
 - 68% of respondents from the study met criteria for a PTSD diagnosis
Farley, Melissa & Barkan, Howard, “Prostitution, Violence, and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder”, Women 8: Health, Vol. 27(3) 1998
- Cultural norms and morals cause many in society to view the sexual assault of sex workers as “part of the job” and that those engaged in such work “deserved or even asked for the rape”.
Farley, M. and V. Kelly., “Prostitution: A Critical Review of the Medical and Social Sciences Literature.” Women and Criminal Justice, 2000.
- Because sex work is illegal in most of the US, many sex workers come across barriers in accessing financial, health, legal, and educational services. Many do not report their assaults due to fear of disbelief, judgment, arrest, and even sexual assault by law enforcement.
Thukral, Juhu Esq., Ditmore, Melissa, Ph.D., and Murphy, Alexandra, “Behind Closed Doors: An Analysis of Indoor Sex Work in New York City”, Sex Workers Project at the Urban Justice Center, 2005.